What is claimed is:

- 1. An optical element having a plate-like shape, which comprises a light-transmitting resin and minute regions, said minute regions being dispersedly distributed in said light-transmitting resin and having a birefringence different from said light-transmitting resin, wherein at least one of said light-transmitting resin and said minute regions contains at least one luminescent material.
- The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said at least one luminescent material is a fluorescent material that absorbs any one of ultraviolet light and visible light and emits visible light.
- 3. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said at least one luminescent material is a phosphorescent material that absorbs any one of ultraviolet light and visible light and emits visible phosphorescence.
- 4. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said minute regions are made of any one of a liquid crystal material, a material in glass state that is formed by fixing a liquid crystal phase upon cooling, and a material that is formed by crosslinking and fixing a liquid crystal phase of a liquid crystal monomer upon irradiation of energy rays.
- 5. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said minute regions are made of a liquid crystal polymer that has a glass transition temperature of 50°C or higher and exhibits a nematic liquid crystal phase at a temperature lower than the glass transition temperature of the light-transmitting resin.

6. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein the following expressions (1)-(3) are established for refractive index difference between said minute regions and said light-transmitting resin:

0.03≦∆n1≦0.5

(1)

 $0 \leq \Delta n_2 \leq 0.03$

(2)

0≦Δn3≦0.03

(3)

where.

 Δ n1: refractive index difference in an axial direction of the minute regions, along which a maximum refractive index difference occurs

Δn2: refractive index difference in an axial direction orthogonal to the axial direction along which the maximum refractive index difference occurs

 Δ n3: refractive index difference in an axial direction orthogonal to the axial direction along which the maximum refractive index difference occurs.

- 7. A polarized-light-emitting surface light source comprising an optical element having a plate-like shape and a light source that emits light of a wavelength that is capable of exciting a luminescent material contained in said optical element, said optical element comprising a light-transmitting resin and minute regions, said minute regions being dispersedly distributed in said light-transmitting resin and having a birefringence different from said light-transmitting resin, wherein at least one of said light-transmitting resin and said minute regions contains at least one luminescent material.
- 8. The polarized-light-emitting surface light source according to claim 7, further comprising a light guide member for guiding light emitted from said light source to said optical element, said light guide member being made of a light passing material.

- 9. The polarized-light-emitting surface light source according to claim 7 comprising an electroluminescence element.
- 10. A display unit comprising the polarized-light-emitting surface light source according to claim 7.